

## Dawson Family of Rockville/Rocky Glen Farm

**R**ocky Glen, or the Dawson Farm, is one of the few farms in Rockville that continues to preserve a sense of time and place. Farm buildings and considerable open space have been preserved to retain Rocky Glen's significance in Rockville's history.

The Dawson Family called its farm "Rocky Glen" because of the topography of the site and the massive outcroppings of white quartzite rock. The small glen was

shaded by a grove of huge chestnut trees. The chestnut trees were destroyed by a blight in the early 20th century, but many other large trees remain. The farm is significant for the architecture of the buildings, with two of the last remaining farmhouses in Rockville, and its historical association with a prominent Montgomery County family.

Four generations of Dawsons lived at Rocky Glen. Under the ownership of Lawrence A. Dawson, the farm was the site of Civil War activities. By the

early 20th century, the farm had expanded to approximately 500 acres and contained two dwellings, a granary, stable, barn and other outbuildings. It extended from Rockville Pike to where I-270 is now located and included the land between Edmonston Drive and Monroe Street. The land was continuously farmed from the 1840s through 1979, although its use was limited to grazing during the latter 30 years.



PRESERVING A SENSE OF *time* AND *place*.



# Dawson Family History

## Lawrence Allnutt Dawson

Thomas Dawson (1708-1800) left his family home in Charles County, Maryland in 1750 and established Dawsonville in, what was then Frederick County, but later became Montgomery County. The Dawsons were a prominent family in Montgomery County whose members played important roles in local politics and commerce for several generations.

Thomas Dawson's great-grandson, Lawrence A. Dawson (1807-1875), was born in Dawsonville but was the first member of the family to settle in Rockville. He came to Rockville to study law and served in the Maryland House of Delegates in the 1837 session which passed the Reform Act, a major step in the democratization of Maryland's political structure. In 1840, he purchased the farm of his associate, Benjamin Forrest. The purchase included a small c.1815 log house. In 1844, Lawrence married Mary Elizabeth Kiger and brought her to the farm to live.

The Dawsons enlarged the original house with a two-story clapboard addition overlooking a fork of Cabin John Creek to accommodate their growing family. They also purchased additional acreage in 1856. The 2 1/2-story vernacular farmhouse that now stands at the northeastern portion of the park was built in 1874. It was attached to the original enlarged structure that was demolished in the 1930s. The rectangular frame building reflects the influence of the Gothic Revival style. Its steeply pitched roof has a pointed center gable. All seven Dawson children were born and raised at Rocky Glen.

During the Civil War, Lawrence Dawson and his family strongly supported the Union. The farm bordered the Rockville Pike and was the site of several troop encampments and skirmishes. The Dawsons hid Union soldiers, nursed those who were injured or ill, and fed members of both armies who appeared at their door. Soldiers and horses were sometimes hidden in the woods to the back of the farm and the Dawson children brought food to them.

Lawrence Dawson served as Commissioner of the draft for the Union army during the war. With other local northern sympathizers, he was captured in 1863 by the famed Confederate Cavalry General J.E.B. Stuart but was freed the next day as Stuart hurried to Gettysburg. General Jubal Early's Confederate troops camped at the Fairgrounds which bordered the farm during their 1864 raid on Washington and some of the officers came to the farmhouse. They left without incident after they were given dinner. After the war, Lawrence Dawson resumed his law practice and continued to farm the land for the rest of his life.

Lawrence Dawson died in 1875 and Mary K. Dawson died in 1877. Some of their children continued to supervise the farming operations until each in turn left to move out west or pursue other opportunities.

## Henry (Hal) Dawson

Henry (Hal) Dawson was the fifth child of Lawrence A. and Mary Dawson's seven children. He left the farm in 1879, at age 24, to open a drygoods and grocery store in Rockville. He married and lived at 101 North Adams Street. Hal returned to Rocky Glen in 1881 after his wife and infant son died. He left Rockville in 1885 and moved to the Dakota Territory where he amassed a considerable fortune as a cattleman and entrepreneur. He was one of the early developers of South Dakota and set up several banks, hotels and other businesses. Hal married Fannie Knight Williams in 1892 after his second wife died of tuberculosis in 1889. Fannie was

a teacher at the Sioux boarding school in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. The Dawsons returned east in 1911 to provide their four children with greater educational opportunities.

Upon his return, Hal Dawson bought his siblings' interest in the family farm. Rather than enlarging the existing house set in the shady glen, Fannie Dawson chose a nearby location on a hill that would provide the feeling of openness and wide vistas to which she was accustomed in the west. The size and elaborate architecture of this second farmhouse demonstrate the growing prosperity of the Dawson Farm in the early 20th century. The large stucco



Dawson family farm view from Rockville Pike, circa early 20th century.

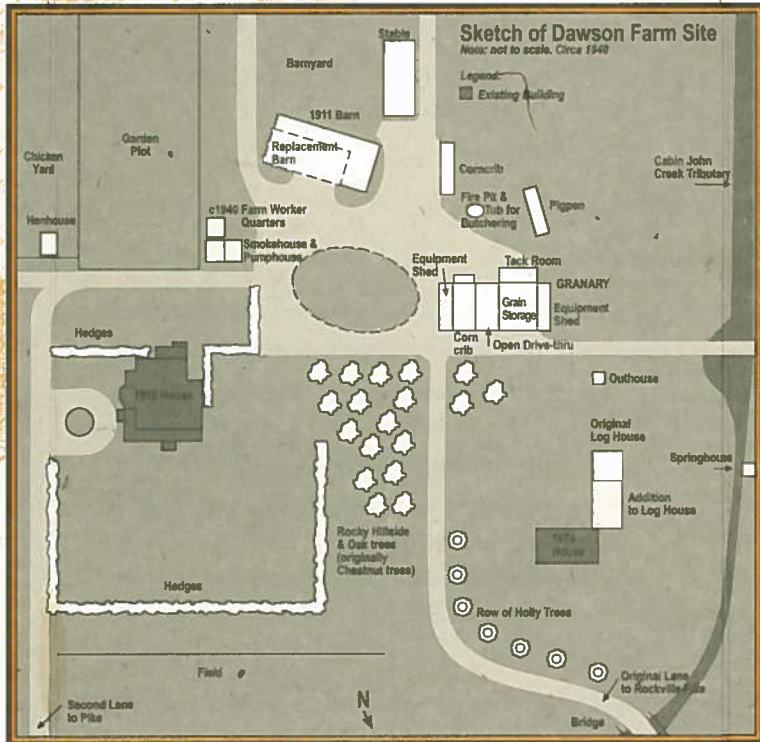
two structures. A lane ran from the gate past the corn crib, pig pens and butchering area into and around the granary, and down the hill to the creek. The park path follows this original farm road. Horses were watered at a small pool which formed at the creek near where the bridge from Ritchie Parkway into the park is today. Hal Dawson experimented with raising western cattle and horses upon his return to Rocky Glen after spending almost 30 years in South Dakota. He later sold the west-

ern cattle and increased the volume of crops that the farm produced. Cattle, hogs, milk and cream were sold at various times, but pigs and chickens were kept primarily for family use.

A two-section outbuilding was situated between the barn and the 1912 farmhouse. It contained the smokehouse and the pump-house. In the 1940s, a small adjacent building was added to accommodate a farm worker. Wood was hauled from the rear of the farm to the woodpile near the pumphouse. It was chopped and stored for use in the fireplaces or in Fannie Dawson's big kitchen stove, which was later donated to the Montgomery County Historical Society.

The Dawson Farm Granary was located between the 1874 farmhouse and the barn. It was demolished in 1977. The granary pre-dates the two existing farmhouses and was a large frame structure built on stone piers. It had two main openings through which wagons stacked high with hay could pass or be parked for shelter. The framework structure now occupying this site recalls the dimensions and outline of the original building.

The granary complex included corn cribs, grain storage areas, tack room, root cellar, blacksmith area, and sheds for farming equipment. The butchering area and pit were on the south side, near the pig pens. Milk cows, horses, pigs and chickens were kept on the farm and the primary crops were wheat, corn and alfalfa.



and timber house at the east end of the park embodies the stylistic eclecticism of the time. It features a Craftsman interior and a combination of Queen Anne and Mission style elements on the exterior. Fannie Dawson drew plans for the 20-

room house. She was influenced by the Prairie School of architecture and the American Arts and Crafts movement. This was reflected in the house, its furnishings, her collections and hand-work. Her design was spacious and welcoming to accommodate the family's many guests. The builder, Mr. Lance of Des Moines,

Iowa, built the house almost completely by himself and lived with the Dawson family for the three years (1912-1914) that it took to complete.

The house is reminiscent of the many grand houses that once lined Rockville Pike. The interior has a large open stairwell, arched entranceways, and big, open rooms. The library, or "Indian Room," held much of the Dawsons' extensive collection of Native American artifacts, reminders of their life in the west and their friendship and respect for the Lakota and Navajo people. Native American artifacts, including two stone ax heads and a stone mortar and pestle, have been found on the premises.



The Dawson family home built in 1912. This view is facing towards Rockville Pike.

## From Working Farm to Historic Park

Hal Dawson managed the farm until his death in 1937. His wife, Fannie, continued the operation until she died in

1948. Despite growing up on the farm, none of the children of Lawrence A. Dawson or Hal Dawson were raised to be farmers. They became lawyers, businessmen or held government appointments. Many of them oversaw the operations of the farm in addition to their other duties. One of Hal Dawson's sons, Walter Dawson, served in the House of Delegates and as State's Attorney. His sister, Rose, lived on the farm until her death in 1979 and served on the Board of Education Supervisors for 30 years.

The Dawsons donated parcels of the farm for various civic purposes, including Richard Montgomery High School. The bulk of the property was sold for residential development beginning in the 1950s. The two dwellings and the last 14 acres passed out of the Dawson family in 1980. The Dawson Farm Park, including the two farmhouses, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. The farmhouses are also in a local historic district.

The City of Rockville acquired the vacant and deteriorated 1874 farmhouse and part of the farm property in 1980. The City then sold the house to Peerless Rockville Historic Preservation, Ltd. in 1983. Peerless Rockville retained an exterior easement, but sold the house to new owners who renovated it and retain it as their private residence. Descendants of Hal and Fannie Dawson lived in the 1912 house until the property was sold. That house is now part of the Dawson Farm Park, which consists of approximately six acres.



Dawson family and their servants in front of the 1874 farmhouse.



Hal Dawson pictured with three grandchildren in tow.



Fannie Dawson pictured above with one of her children. Fannie continued overseeing the farm after Hal died, until her death in 1948.

## Farming Operations

The Dawson farming operations were expanded to approximately 500 acres in the early 20th century through Hal Dawson's purchase of adjacent farmland. In addition to cultivated fields, some of the land was left wooded and other acres were used as pasture.

When Hal Dawson returned to Rocky Glen in 1911 he enlarged the farm and built a large bank barn. As with all bank barns, the original barn was two stories. Hay wagons drove in above from the north side and cows were milked on the ground floor which opened to a large barnyard. The barn burned in the 1920s and was replaced in this same location with a smaller one of only one level. It was torn down in 1979.

A stable stood west of the barn and shared the same barnyard. There was a wide gate between the



Livestock-drawn equipment helped with the Dawson's farming efforts.